



Dwelling in the Human/Posthuman Entanglement of Poetic Inquiry: Poetic Missives to and from Carl Leggo

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Abstract:

This inaugural Dr. Carl Leggo Memorial Lecture on Poetic Inquiry was delivered at the 7th International Symposium on Poetic Inquiry on October 3rd, 2019. I share a poetic conversation I have crafted out of Carl's work that allows me, and all of us, to enter into a continuing dialogue with Carl's words, which survive and will live on without his earthly presence. I discuss the process I undertook to create these poetic missives, in my voice and Carl's, following the dialogue. All of the work beginning with "Dear Monica" are found poems created from Carl's writing—his prose, not his poetry. My own poetic messages to Carl are mostly original, although they include a bit of found poetry from the literature on posthumanism. And the abecedarian poem is definitely inspired by Carl's love of this type of poem, and his playful joy, always, in exploring the possibilities of language and poetry.

Keywords: Carl Leggo; curriculum studies; poetic inquiry

Penser à l'implication humaine/post-humaine de l'investigation poétique : Messages poétiques à destination et en provenance de Carl Leggo

Résumé :

Cette conférence commémorative du Dr. Carl Leggo sur l'investigation poétique a été prononcée pour la première fois au 7ème Symposium International, tenu le 3 octobre 2019. Je partage un entretien poétique que j'ai mené à partir des œuvres de Carl qui permet à moi et à nous tous de nous lancer dans un dialogue continu aux œuvres de Carl, qui survivent sa vie par terre. Je discute les étapes empruntées pour accoucher ce discours poétique, avec ma voix et celle de Carl, suite à l'entretien. « Chère Monica » est l'expression qui commence les poésies découlant des œuvres de Carl – de sa prose, mais non pas de sa poésie. Bien que mes messages poétiques tirent leur inspiration de la littérature post humaniste, ils sont majoritairement originaux. Et la base du poème-abecedaire est définitivement inspirée par l'amour de Carl pour ce type de poème, et sa joie amusante à explorer continuellement les possibilités du langage et de la poésie.

Mots clés : études en curriculum; recherche poétique; Carl Leggo

I am very honoured to have been invited to deliver this memorial lecture in the name of our dear departed colleague and friend, Dr. Carl Leggo. Many in this room know how much we have lost—an incalculable amount—with Carl’s passing in March of this year. Many of you here were Carl’s supervisees as graduate students, and many others knew him for many years and certainly throughout the dozen years this symposium has been held. However, some of you here may never have met nor encountered Carl or his work. This lecture today is designed with you in mind, in that I hope it will succeed in encouraging you to seek out Carl’s scholarship and the many, many major contributions he made to the field of poetic inquiry.

It is no exaggeration to say that we would not be here today without Carl. He and I co-hosted the first ISPI at UBC in 2007. We invited a number of people we had never even met; those whose poetic inquiry work had appeared on our radar in the gathering of an annotated bibliography on poetic approaches to social science research. This was the subject of my 2006-2008 SSHRC-funded postdoctoral research study, carried out under Carl’s supervision. And we invited a number of graduate students and others, many who Carl requested, based on his knowledge of their work, to that first gathering in the fall of 2007.

When it was decided to keep the symposium going on a biennial basis, which has happened to this day, we never imagined the flourishing of work that this group would produce: an edited book collection and journal special issue out of each ISPI since then. To date, that means that six books and six journal issues are out in the world as a direct result of Carl’s generosity of spirit, his ability to say “Yes” that never seemed to falter. He said yes to me when I approached him at a conference in the fall of 2005, very nervously, my heart hammering away, to see if he would consider supporting my postdoctoral application. I asked him if he could give me five minutes of his time. His response was to tell me I could have more than five minutes. And, indeed, we sat together for over an hour talking about what I wanted to work on with him. Two minutes into that meeting he stopped me and said there was no need for me to “sell him” on what I proposed—he was in, one hundred percent. The rest of that first meeting, with great joy, we had our first of dozens of conversations about poetry and the work it could do as an arts-based form of qualitative research. And whenever an ISPI was held, we would greet each other as proud parents who had birthed this small but vibrant scholarly community into being out of our shared passion for poetry, for spinning words into worlds.

Today I want to share with you a poetic conversation I have crafted out of Carl’s work that allows me, and all of us, to enter into a continuing dialogue with Carl’s words, which survive and will live on without his earthly presence. I will discuss the process I undertook to create these poetic missives, in my voice and Carl’s, following my reading of the dialogue. All of the work beginning with “Dear Monica” are found poems created from Carl’s writing—his prose, not his poetry. My own poetic messages to Carl are mostly original, although they include a bit of found poetry from the literature on posthumanism. And the abecedarian poem is definitely inspired by Carl’s love of this type of poem, and his playful joy, always, in exploring the possibilities of language and poetry. Let’s begin.

Poetic Missives to/from Carl Leggo

1. Dear Carl

a haiku chain poem

you are posthuman now
being becoming stardust
yet your words remain

your words yet remain
poet of life (love and loss)
(he)artful scribe, scribbling

your heart-full scribbling
lines of life in flight, soaring
crow-trickster-joker

joker-trickster-crow
at play in remembering
riffing as you riff

you riff and ruffle
cast your eyes over, leaf through
ruminate (always)

always ruminat-
ing on memory, its cost
lost father/brother

father/brother lost
your writing on loss
a gift for me now

for me the gift now
your teaching me (yet again)
to bear death in life

death in life is bare-
ly bearable but for your
words, enfolding me

enfolded in words
held in the presence of Carl
I let go Leggo

to let go Leggo
i engage one last time in
poetic wonder
poetic wonder-
ings across the human/post
human wanderings
wandering human—
lost and found with words—plays in
more-than-human world
world more-than-human
yet broken by rape and greed
out of control now
now out of control
the planet rebels yelling
i am in such pain
such pain i am in
ecological despair
Anthropocene rage
Rage, Anthropocene,
with your fires and storms, hold us
to account, count us
count us to account
for mass extinction, rise seas
drown us all awake
awake as we drown
prophetic imaginings
now are all too true
all are now too true
Carl, where are you? not gone? gone?
still here, yes, heart-held
heart-held, here, help me
face our own extinction
choose love, not despair
choose love choose love
choose love choose love choose love

2. Dear Monica

the hole in my heart

I want to call out my grief
because grief is now my teacher

most people I know
do not want to hold
my clichéd heart
now pickled in grief

I walk the course of loss
this curriculum of loss
on my own

I know the hole in my heart
I hope I can learn
how
to live with the hole

I believe in eternal life
that those who have died
are still present
still caring for us
still eager for
communication

begin each new day
with hope
(even joy)
in the midst of loss

the curriculum of loss
is a curriculum of hope

(found poem from Leggo, 2017)

3. Dear Carl

the posthuman

i am fear-filled
cowed
by the posthuman
facing the endgame
of our species
on this planet
intimidated
 by rhizomatic
 lines of flight
 machinic assemblages
 networks of networks
 new materialisms
agential realisms

*the only thing
that does not matter
anymore
is matter* (Barad, 2003, p. 801)

**but if matter is all i know
how can matter not matter?**

It is vitally important that we understand how matter matters. (p. 803)

how does matter matter to the artist, the poet,
the writer, the musician, the actor, the dancer?
to see myself (and all else) entangled, to know it,
to be with and of the universe: is this the way, the answer?
... *the sticky problem of humanity's own captivity within language* (p. 812)
can only anthropocentric humanism help us now?
to be the tree, the whale, the polar bear feels injurious/unjust
i want to decentre myself but i don't know how
the voice of the nonhuman is a voice i must not trust
enraptured/captured by language i have no other way
to be both wave and particle, a lightbeam at play

*things do not have inherently determinate boundaries or properties,
and*

words do not have inherently determinate meanings (p. 813)

i am trying to follow this path, unbound with/out meaning, believe me
but am limited by my breath, my body, my brain that conceives me

matter comes to matter

through the iterative

intra-activity

of the world

in its becoming (p. 823)

matter coming to matter

is process

(from Heraclitus, to Bohr, to Barad)

is performative

this is known

written in voice

in the material body

in water

not stone

the stones

marked

with scrawled

letters ledgers leavings lines

on the sides

of our roads

only

techno/logical

gravestones

left behind

white noise

&

ever-running

codes

4. Dear Monica

small philosophies on fear and love

i.

Life is full:

unseasonable rain and sun

strong winds

blow

in the wrong direction

good news/bad news

gifts and bills

praises and insults

Some suffer:

far more than others

none of us

is immune

is inured to pain

(pain: a reminder

life is complex

&

mysterious)

never to be

taken

for granted

in the tangled midst of the events

experiences

emotions of each day's living

be careful:

don't perceive

the world

as fearful only

embrace fear:

lean into it

live with it

as everydayness

cycling sometimes with

&

sometimes against

the wind

(the wind: not to be feared

or despised)

an ecological understanding

everything

&

everyone

is connected

ii.

██████████ **full of fears.** ██████████ the
hollow in my heart ██████████ the holes ██████████
██████████ like gaping wounds ██████████ my search for wholeness ██████████
██████████ a subject-in-process ██████████ encyclopaedia of stories ██████████ hypertextually emerging ██████████
evolving ██████████ under construction ██████████ in relationship with others ██████████
██████████ written with ██████████ patience, hope, and affection ██████████
██████████ for living with love ██████████ to live fearlessly ██████████ [is] to live
with love.

(found poems from Leggo, 2011)

5. Dear Carl

What is posthuman poetic inquiry?

In Deleuzean terms

a molecular vision of the alternative
a plurality of fissions and margins
a system of deviances

(straining for communicability
while

protecting its
marginality)

registering in the local
enacting the future life
of difference

a way to dream
(and perhaps enact)
postqualitative work

The question is

how might we move from:

what needs to be opposed
to

what can be imagined

out of:

what is already happening
embedded in an immanence
of

doing
?

(found poems from Lather, 2016, p. 129)

how to write

a poem for

the posthuman: an abecedarian recipe

add one non-Anthropocentric agentic assemblage
blended with Braidotti and Barad
crafted chaotically complexly collectively
diffracted deflected diffused dispersed
entangled in/with everything else
folding-in the fearless and feminist
(generalizable no more)
humans becoming → machines becoming → human
injected into → iterative intra-activity ←
jolted by injustice
knower and the unknown
layer Lather latherings in lines of flight
mix in more-than-human matters
non-anthropomorphic notes
onerously/ontologically open
purée performing post the post-post
questioning yet querulous
reduce with rhizomes rooted in
subaltern secular spaces (with St. Pierre sanctified non-subjectivity)
technologies + deterritorialized territories (tremulous transformations)
upset understanding unsure of itself
vexed and vexatious
whisk with the weight of the world
extant becoming *extinct*
yet yearning for the *not-yet*
zealous zoomorphic unzippings

mix all ingredients well
to reveal *onto-epistem-ologies*
of emergence

meeting the universe
half ← → way

(found/inspired by Barad, 2003, 2007; Braidotti, 2013; Brinkmann, 2017; Charteris, Nye, & Jones, 2019; Lather, 2016; McKnight, 2018; Somerville & Powell, 2019)

6. Dear Monica

What does it mean to dwell poetically?

(Aoki, 1979/2005, p. 375)

Carl's questions: a four-part found poem

i. Vox Autobiographia / Identitatis

Can the heart . . . avoid clichés?

Can the poet who is seeking

to understand his heart

. . . avoid clichés?

How are you?

"Fine. You?"

Who am I? Who am I in relation to the world?

How should I live? What are the responsibilities

of a human being in the contemporary world?

What do we need

in order to live

with more courage

and creativity

and exploration

and experimentation?

How am I going to live this new day?

(What secrets do I have that I don't want to share?)

How can a person

who walks daily in plural stories

ever hope to find

places for meeting

other people

who walk in their plural stories?

How do we learn

to tell all the stories,

to ring the bell,

even if no one is listening,

even if no one cares,

even if no one responds?

What is the need,

urge,

compulsion
to record, store,
re/store, restory
my experiences,
 my emotions,
 my memories,
when I do not even know
who “my” refers to?

What am I doing in my words?
Who is this writer who holds the pen?
Have I met him yet?

Do I want to?

ii. Vox Veritas

The process: a prose poem

The process cannot be described by circular or linear metaphors, but by a metaphor of divergence—the dissemination of opinions about opinions, knowing no end, seeking the truth that is not, apparently always drawing closer to truth but in truth never doing so, which is still untrue because in the game of chasing the traces of words, endlessly deferring and differing, there is truth even if it is the truth that there is no truth (only opinions) or the truth that it is more fun to chase non-truth than not chase at all or the truth that fun has purpose even though you cannot be sure what the purpose is or whether there is purpose—one more unconscious desire? one more ideologically constructed “value”? one more false hope to ward off the demons of despair?

naked truth

What is the pull to fabrication,
to organize and structure
line the chaos of experience

so I can reveal (at l(e)ast)
my experience
to others?

Why do I
want to reveal
my experience
to others?

What is
this urge:

for self-revelation,
for exposing myself in public,
for standing naked in the middle of a shopping mall?

How much of myself
do I really reveal?

iii. Vox Poetica

Why is a poem significant?

Do we really need poems,
or is that just a poet's hope
for endorsement and response?

What can a poem do?

What does it mean to be human?

Who will listen?

How does poetry know?

What does poetry know?

How do I know poetry?

What do I know?

What is the pull of words

(like a siren call)

that cannot be denied?

Do I listen with my ears,

my heart,

my spirit,

my blood,

my bones?

What is the vocabulary of the heart?

What is the syntax of the heart?

What is the grammar of the heart?

How many languages do we have?

what is the language

of fire earth air water?

Have you ever seen

a maple leaf after winter,

filled with the sun,

cut its shape in spring ice?

iv. Vox Cupio

What are the ducks laughing about?

What would
a curriculum of enchantments
look like?

What if we devoted
our teaching and learning,
our living curriculum,
to exploring:
"how many kinds
of enchantments
there are
in this world"?

What would research be like
if we acknowledged
the miraculous experience
of the earth,
the experience
of miracles

of seasons, day and night,
creatures and stars and snowflakes
beyond counting and naming?

What would research be like
if we devoted our energies
to exploring possibilities
where people could stand in the spaces
between commonplace and miracle,
and know in each moment
the momentousness
of "unfathomable life"?

(found poems from *Storying the World: The Contributions of Carl Leggo on Language and Poetry*
[Irwin, Hasebe-Ludt, & Sinner, 2019])

7. Dear Carl

i like to think

i like to think
that you would
delight
in this work

as i mirror
your play-
full-ness
wording these worlds

a space for we two
to be together again
mentor & mentee
poet & poet
language lovers
& performers

that you and i
shepherded into being
an inquiry community
("we happy few")
with an invitation
to come and play
in the worlds of words

that you are
found
bound between
these lines
in poetic stellar-
illuminations
one last time

that you would murmur
"wonderful"
and
"beautiful"
as you listen

that you
would ask

the best and
most essential
question
 at the end

that you could tell me
 being posthuman
 is not that hard

that you are
spinning with the stars
&
falling free in moonbeams
shining down in
particulate waves
on the snows of
Lynch's Lane
&
York Harbour,
Newfoundland

 that you are
 finally
 and forever
 at home

Reflective Ruminations

To carry out this work, I began by reading through *Storying the World* (Irwin, Hasebe-Ludt, & Sinner, 2019) and a couple of other recent writings by Carl (Leggo, 2018, 2014). I made use of Wolff's (1972) surrender-and-catch method that I had previously used in sifting through the 2007-2012 addition to my ever-expanding bibliography of poetic inquiry practice (Prendergast, 2015). Wolff's phenomenological method first appeared to me in my search for poetic methods during my postdoctoral studies, and appeals greatly to me as an arts-based researcher:

To surrender means to take as fully, to meet as immediately as possible whatever the occasion may be, that is, not to select, not to believe that one can know quickly what is to be understood and acted on, hence what one's experience means; not to suppose that one can do justice to the experience with one's received notions, with one's received feeling and thinking, even with the received structure of that feeling and thinking; to meet it as much as possible in its originality, its itself-ness. . . . What is caught (comprehended, conceived), what catching ("conceiving") means cannot be anticipated (otherwise surrender would not be as unconditional as it is), for its result may not be a concept in the everyday or scientific sense of the word but, for instance, a decision, a poem, a painting, the clarification or urging of an

existential question, a change in the person: ontologically it always is a new conceiving, a new concept, a beginning, a new being-in-the-world. (Wolff, 1972, p. 453-454; Prendergast, 2015, p. 682)

One thing I knew I wanted to “catch” in Carl’s works were his questions. He was an avid questioner and questions can be found scattered across and throughout most of his writings. And I had in mind to craft a found poem, or set of poems, (as actually unfolded) using his questions as the basis. But other than gathering these questions, I tried to remain open, surrendering myself to Carl’s words, and catching passages that spoke most powerfully to me. I limited myself to focusing on his prose, not his poems that appear woven through all of his writing. In my view, Carl’s poems speak for themselves, and require no further interpretive unpacking. I considered following his engagement with Dorothy Livesay’s poetry—in crafting a poem where he moves back and forth between his favorite lines pulled from her poems and lines of his own (Leggo, 2017)—but I ended up working only with his prose for this project. Perhaps that engagement with his poetry may follow someday hence.

It does not surprise me in hindsight to note that two of the found poems in the sequence above are derived from two articles: “The Faces of Love: The Curriculum of Loss” (Leggo, 2017) and “Living Love: Confessions of a Fearful Teacher” (Leggo, 2011). In navigating through my own grief in the wake of Carl’s death, I found great solace in these two articles. Given that I knew I wanted to speak imaginatively with Carl about posthumanism and its impact on my thinking (about both the world at large, as well as on the methodology of poetic inquiry), the topics of loss and fear were significant “catches” for me. What do we potentially lose (as in pretty much everything) as we move from a human to a posthuman world? How does the humanistically rooted field of poetic inquiry, so concerned with “humanizing research” (Paris & Winn, 2014), make the shift toward the post-qualitative and posthuman discourses now so prevalent in the social sciences and humanities? Or is this shift to be resisted? And if so, why and how?

So, what have I “found” in crafting this work, these poetic missives? Certainly, I have found comfort in dwelling with Carl’s writing. For those of you here who are grieving as heavily as I have been doing, I hope this rendering of his prose into poetry will offer you some solace as well. There is much wisdom in Carl’s work, as humbly as he may have presented it. There is also the fearlessness of an autobiographical poet and scholar in addressing difficult questions about what it was he was trying to do; what he hoped to accomplish in his self-representation and in his research. This imaginary dialogue has also helped me to creatively process my own fears and misgivings about posthumanist theory, a lot of which I find intimidating in its complexity and in its eventual implications, including my own growing sense of ecological despair about the fate of humanity on this planet.

In terms of adding to my understanding of poetic inquiry methods, the addition of two new poetic voices is a significant result. In addition to the voices *Vox Autobiographia/Autoethnographia*, *Vox Theoria*, *Vox Participare*, *Vox Poetica*, *Vox Justitia*, *Vox Identitatis*, *Vox Custodia*, and *Vox Procreator* that I have identified as working in the literature on poetic inquiry to date (Prendergast, 2009, 2015), I can now add two more emerging from Carl’s work: *Vox Veritas* and *Vox Cupio*. These are the voices of truth telling (*veritas*) and of wishing/dreaming (*cupio*). How wonderful it is to be

able to add these voices into the mix, as they feel so resonant with Carl's work. He was equal parts truth teller and dreamer, never flinching from his excavation of memory, as pain-filled as it sometimes could be, and never failing in his imagining a better world filled with the love of language and poetry.

Carl, my friend, you are posthuman now, that cannot be denied. But we live with what you have left behind, with gratitude and love. Always love, love and more love. Thank you.

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